

Bianca Butthole of Betty Blowtorch

“Size Queen,” October 2001

Hanging out one day with ex-Mary’s Danish bassist Chris “Wag” Wagner, Bianca Butthole grabbed his bass and starting plucking away. “He was like, ‘You’re a natural!’ I’m all, ‘Shut up!’ He goes, ‘No, you are! If you don’t play I’m gonna kick your ass!’” Bianca got serious about it a few years later, laying down fast and heavy lines for hardcore punk bands the Humble Gods and Butt Trumpet, whose hilariously obnoxious *Primitive Enema* [EMI] caught the attention of the conservative Parents Music Resource Center and others in 1993. When three-fourths of Butt Trumpet grabbed a new drummer in 1998, they formed Betty Blowtorch. Guns N’ Roses bassist Duff McKagan produced the band’s *Get Off* EP.

Betty’s full-length debut on Foodchain, *Are You Man Enough?*, showcases Bianca’s great time, Fender Precision sound, and rock-solid approach. In the studio, Bianca captures her classic, sludgy tone on songs like “Size Queen” and “Love/Hate” by miking her 1969 Ampeg SVT 8x10 and using her fingers. (“Picks are for pussies—you can put that in print!”) Being the band’s frontwoman has its challenges, though. “Singing and playing took a little practice. I can’t noodle as much,” she laughs. “I don’t play tons of bass on this album—just straightforward rock & roll.”

Growing up in Southern California, Bianca tried piano and guitar before Kiss, Ted Nugent, and Led Zeppelin helped her realize she was built to play 4-string. “The guitar strings were tiny, and it was a lot harder than the tennis racket I used for air guitar. John Paul Jones was amazing; he blew my frickin’ mind. I really liked the boominess, the beat, and the sound of bass. Plus, bass players are usually the nicest guys in the band.”

Bianca's early-'80s Precision, a gift from Wag, has undergone several coats of paint and a couple unintentional modifications. "I was a hired gun, and the band said they were gonna put new pickups in my bass for a punchier sound. I didn't think they would change my whole bass, but they put in an active J pickup. I was bummed at the time, but I'm over it now." She prefers Spectraflex or DiMarzio nylon-wrapped cables ("They don't tangle as easy") and standard-gauge GHS Boomer strings—or whatever she gets from her friends. And she never uses effects. "I get such warm, ballsy tone and distortion from my SVT that I don't need anything else."

Stepping straight to the mike, the wiry, tattooed Bianca straps on her P-Bass and addresses the audience. "I have one thing to say to you motherfuckers," she screams. "We're a bunch of horny bitches, and we're hell on wheels!" With that, a rising tide of feedback crashes into place, the drummer comes down hard, and Ms. Butthole kickstarts her SVT to life.

—E.E. Bradman

(Bianca was killed in a New Orleans car accident on Dec. 14, 2001.)